

Education Governance Responses
Manchester Meeting (4/4/07) - Manchester Elementary and Middle School

14 Attendees (facilitated by George Appenzeller)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

Local control
Leadership by consensus
Greater connection to community
Local connectedness
Close scrutiny from community
Responsive to citizens' needs/requests
Local control
Local faces, local access, more specific
More autonomy

Disadvantages

Turn over (school directors)
Citizen involvement (limited to school directors)
Not sharing resources
Difficult for superintendent's office to serve so many boards
Primary focus should be education but current system does not allow that
Everyone involved looks at issues from a narrow perspective
SU board issues – role of board members (SU vs. local), lack of consistency due to high board turnover
Middle schools competing for students
Less control than you think
Too many boards – meetings – prep
Boards that are not student oriented
Structure is too managerial vs. visionary
Out of balance – not proportional level of services (to costs)

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

Common issues addressed
Forces collaboration and compromise
Consistency, clarity, consolidation of policies
Efficiencies of entire system
Save \$
Increased efficiency and less micromanagement
Better citizen understanding of responsibilities and board structure
Consistency of rules and policies (eg high school tuition)
Board stability and knowledge
Greater neutrality to decision making

Eliminate the competitive aspect of salary levels between schools
Delivery of services streamlined and efficiency shared

Disadvantages

Unique issues not addressed
Less local control
Community identity
Perceived loss of a voice
Out of balance
Transition would be a challenge
Smaller towns would lose their voice in how children educated - perception
Capital costs
Less citizen involvement in local government
Many need more asst. superintendents
Flow of funds to different local economies
Local loss of principal oversight and accountability
Potential loss of local/donation-based funding

Debrief Comments:

Standardize state-wide teacher contracts
Consolidation of smaller schools
Open up candidate pool for senior admin. people by lessening/changing hiring requirements
Rather than making each SU a district, look at what makes sense, geographically and culturally
Dept of Ed database is inaccurate (all students in our SU are not accounted for on yellow sheet)
Any restructuring would need to consider our unique SU – with high school students tuitioned to a variety of schools, including 2 New York schools.
“know what we don’t like”, can’t predict what reaction to proposed new system would be...
Maybe ask>”do you want to change or not?”
Conversation has focused on consolidating schools – what about consolidating towns?
Surprised by enthusiasm for current model partially the result of the individualized attention paid to students
Fear of the unknown – the devil we know is better than the devil we don’t
Could there be some choice about this?
No discussion of school funding and how this change would affect it
Fact that groups were forced to choose three pros/cons was problematic – hard to gauge overall impressions
Split vote on whether or not group wants change
VT is based on closely knit communities- don’t want to lose that level of personalization
Struggle is how to retain personalization while keeping education affordable
Conversation should start with “what are our education objectives?” (felt like conversation started in the middle)
State needs to “throw in a carrot” (but remember that the state is us)
What about the students? We need to make the student the basis of all decisions – that is the starting point
Data sheets are wrong